

Bible Study Revelation
Chapters 21-22

In the last chapter, the final events of God's victory over evil has taken place. Christ returned to earth, destroyed the Satanic armies arrayed against Him. The devil and the Antichrist are cast into hell. Hell was created for this very purpose: "...*the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels*" (Matthew 25:41). All of humanity is judged according to their works. All the many visions of death and destruction we have seen in the book of Revelation now comes to an end. The healing and restoration begins.

"21:1 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away."

This last great event was prophesied by Isaiah:

*"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth;
And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind" (Isaiah 65:17).*

It was also foretold by the Apostle Peter:

"Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13).

This eternal state of a new heaven and new earth can be seen as a description of the final unity of the human person. We were created to be citizens of a perfect earth in the Garden of Eden. We were also created to be citizens of heaven, and rejoice in the endless marriage supper of the Lamb. At the Fall, we were cast out of the perfect earth: "...*therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life*" (Genesis 3:23-24). At the same time, we were denied entry into heaven: "*In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; For dust you are, and to dust you shall return*" (Genesis 3:19). In the new heaven and the new earth, Christ opened the path for us to return to both of our natural habitats.

"2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband...."

The image of Christ as the Bridegroom and the Church as His bride is found elsewhere in Scripture. In the Parable of the Ten Virgins (which we commemorate at Bridegroom Matins to begin Holy Week), Christ depicts Himself as the Bridegroom who departs for a while, but returns marry his Bride and celebrate with His guests. Paul told the Christians in Corinth, "*For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ*" (2 Corinthians 11:2). Paul also instructed the Christians in Ephesus, "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might*

present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25). What was foretold in these passages is fulfilled in Revelation. We saw in the previous chapter:

“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’” (Revelation 19:7-9).

The Bridegroom and the Bride are now coming together in unfathomable mutual love, never to be separated. All of eternity is their endless wedding night. The Universe rejoices in a feast that never ends.

*“⁹ Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, “Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.”
¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God.”*



The vision of the new Jerusalem as descending to the New Earth is significant. Previously, Revelation described that city in very ugly terms: *“And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified” (Revelation 11:8).* But now, as eternity begins, she is pure and chaste, descending to earth as a wedding procession. The Apostle Paul was granted this same vision. *“...for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in*

bondage with her children— but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all (Galatians 4:25-26). The book of Hebrews agrees: *“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels...”* (Hebrews 12:22).

This detail in Paul’s vision of Jerusalem, “...*but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all*,” is significant. Some Orthodox writers and hymns see this as a reference to the Theotokos. This hymn to Mary, sung at the Divine Liturgy throughout the Pascha season, includes this line: “Shine, shine O New Jerusalem! The glory of the Lord has shown on you! Exult now, exult, and be glad O Zion! Be radiant, O pure Theotokos, in the resurrection of your Son!”

“³ And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.”

These words are a quote from many prophecies from the Old and New Testaments, that describe the final, eternal reconciliation between God and humanity:

“Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart” (Jeremiah 24:7). “They shall be My people, and I will be their God” (Jeremiah 32:8).

“...that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God” (11:20).

“My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Ezekiel 27:37).

“I will bring them back, And they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. They shall be My people and I will be their God, In truth and righteousness’ (Zechariah 8:8)

“For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people” (2 Corinthians 6:16)

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Hebrews 8:10).

This prophecy, longed for so often, repeated so often, we see being fulfilled in eternity.

“⁶... I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts.”

In his Gospel, John records Christ’s description of salvation as water to the thirsty: “...*but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life*” (John

4:14). The human race has been thirsting for the water of salvation since the Fall. Now we see Christ's fulfillment of that thirst in eternity.

*"**He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.**"*

Paul often wrote of the state of the faithful in terms of adoption:

"For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15).

"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4-5).

"... having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Ephesians 1:5).

The faithful have already been adopted, but now, we "***shall inherit all things.***"

Here begins an extensive description of the New Jerusalem. It is strikingly similar to the Jewish Temple described by the Prophet Ezekiel, and the throne room of God described in earlier chapters of Revelation:

Future Temple In Ezekiel 40-44	New Jerusalem In Revelation 21	God's Throne Room in Revelation 4
	<i>"¹¹Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal"... ¹⁸The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass."</i>	<i>"Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal."</i>
<i>"⁶ Then he went to the <u>gateway which faced east</u>; and he went up its stairs and measured the threshold of the gateway...²⁰ On the outer court was also <u>a gateway facing north</u>, and he measured its length and its width...²⁴ After that he brought me toward the south, and there <u>a gateway was facing south</u>; and he measured its gateposts and archways according to these</i>	<i>¹² Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: ¹³ <u>three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.</u>"</i>	

<p>same measurements...<i>The building <u>that faced the separating courtyard at its western end</u> was seventy cubits wide...</i>"</p>		
<p>"³...and behold, there was a man whose appearance was like the appearance of bronze. He had a line of flax and a measuring rod in his hand, and he stood in the gateway."</p>	<p><i>¹⁴ Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. ¹⁵ And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. "</i></p>	
<p>"¹³ So he measured the temple, <u>one hundred cubits long</u>; and the separating courtyard with the building and its walls was <u>one hundred cubits long</u>... ¹⁴ also the width of the eastern face of the temple, including the separating courtyard, <u>was one hundred cubits</u>. ¹⁵ He measured the length of the building behind it, facing the separating courtyard, with its galleries on the one side and on the other side, <u>one hundred cubits</u>, as well as the inner temple and the porches of the court..."</p>	<p><i>"¹⁶ The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. <u>Its length, breadth, and height are equal</u>. ¹⁷ Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel."</i></p> <p>(Note: According to these measurements, the New Jerusalem is a cube.)</p>	
	<p><i>"¹⁹ The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of <u>precious stones</u>: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, ²⁰ the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. ²¹ The</i></p>	<p><i>"² Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. ³ And He who sat there was like a <u>jasper</u> and a <u>sardius</u> stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an <u>emerald</u>."</i></p>

	<i>twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl.”</i>	
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The Greek word translated into English as “furlong is “Stadion” (σταδίων). *“The stadion (plural stadia, Greek: στάδιον; latinized as stadium), also anglicized as stade, was an ancient Greek unit of length, consisting of 600 Ancient Greek feet (podes). Its exact length is unknown today; historians estimate it at between 150 m and 210 m.”*

A stadion is approximately .125 miles. So 12,000 stadia times .125 stadia per mile would be approximately 1,500 miles for each side of the New Jerusalem. Since it cube shaped, the New Jerusalem would be 2.25 million cubic miles. There is a good possibility that these dimensions are a symbol which “very big,” like “1,000” means “a very long time.”

“²² But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.”
“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16).

“²³ The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. ²⁴ And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. ²⁵ Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). ²⁶ And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.”

“Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12).

“Come and receive the light that is never overcome by darkness” (Pascha verse)

“²² And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.”

This “*pure river of water of life*” in heaven is a symbolic source of never ending life. It is in stark contrast with the river in icon of last judgement:



“The outcast nations, as well as the Orthodox who did not live righteously, stand by a fiery stream, an image borrowed from the Prophet Daniel...” <https://orthodoxartsjournal.org/icon-last-judgement/>

“² In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month...”

We last saw the Tree of life (also known as the tree of knowledge of good and evil) all the way back in the book of Genesis 2:

“And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”... Then to Adam He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life... So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.”

Now we know what happened to the Tree of Life. It was transported to the New Heaven and the New Earth. Many of the hymns and poetry of the Church point out that the Tree of Life imparted death to Adam and Eve. However, the Cross became its own Tree of Life which imparts life to the faithful. In Revelation we see the Tree of Life returned to its original purpose: *“The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”*

“⁴ They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.”

To see Christ’s face for the first time in heaven is the greatest thrill for the believer.

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“For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2).

*“⁶ Then he said to me, “These words are faithful and true.” And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place.
⁷ “Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”*

As we have seen, the Apostles originally believed that Christ would return during their lifetimes. Only later in their lives did they come to see that Christ might come after their falling asleep.

The book of Revelation began with Jesus addressing the seven Churches of Asia. Now he ends Revelation by addressing all the churches everywhere and in every place:

“¹⁶ I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches.¹⁷ And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.”

This has been the message of Christ ever since. It is a welcome to enter His Kingdom, to endure its hardships, and in the end, find eternal joy beyond our comprehension.

“¹⁸ For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; ¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”

Here the phrases *“the prophecy of this book”* and *“the prophecy of this book and “this book”* refer to the book of Revelation. They do not directly refer to the Bible, which had not been canonized yet. There were some practical reasons for this warning. The first century Roman world was full of forgers, who took others’ books and published them as their own. There were others who took their own works and published them under a famous writers’ name. For example, a book written by one of Gnostics was published under the name, “The Gospel of Thomas.” Other known fraudulent “Gospels” at that time included the “Gospel of Peter” and the “Gospel of Paul.” This final warning of Revelation was likely to dissuade this book to be coopted.